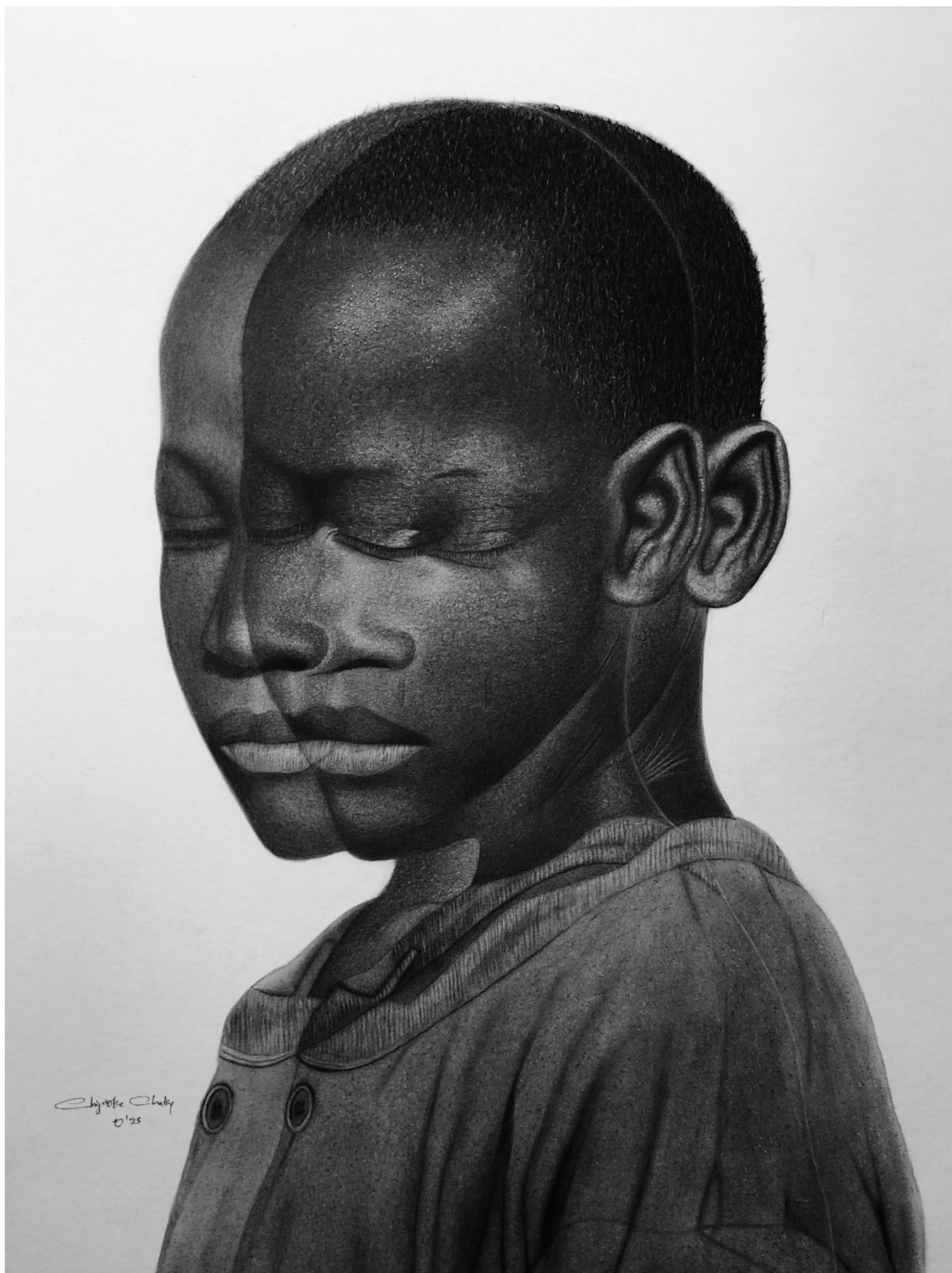




The Human and the Other

Issue 01

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Issue 01: The Human and The Other

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Incongru exists to examine the conditions that shape human lives and the unequal distribution of the freedom to author them.

Cover Artwork: "Clarity of Mind II" by Chukwuemerie Chijioke Anekwe.

Editor's note

Who are you?

A question we battle with at Incongru is whether or not we can truly realize ourselves—

Seeing as it is, the conditions that shape our lives, conditions out of control such as prejudice, ableism, racism, xenophobia.

We cannot help but imagine a life free from such conditions.

A life authored by one's own self.

However, having seen that this is not the case, we must move beyond imagination and seek a way forward.

This issue is a contribution to that search.

The search for a future where life is truly authored by one's self.

INCONGRU | ISSUE 01: "THE HUMAN AND THE OTHER"

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Money (Poetry) — Chidinma Ezenwa
- The Human and The Other (Essay) —
Chidinma Ezenwa
- Flounder (Poetry) — Chidinma Ezenwa
- Oppressive Dominance Dynamics (Essay)
— Chidinma Ezenwa
- The Albescent Berry (Poetry) — Chidinma
Ezenwa
- Held for Today (Daily Portion) (Visual Art)
— Bashiru Olatunji
- Author (Poetry) — Chidinma Ezenwa

- A Letter to God (Visual Art) — Ganiu Ismail
- Dispossessions (Poetry) — Dr. Tiziana Soverino
- Follow Your Dreams (Visual Art) — Belinda Shalls
- The Ritual of Becoming (Visual Art) — Amidu Samson Tobiloba
- Seed of Self (Visual Art) — Chukwuemerie Chijioke Anekwe
- Contributor Biographies

TO THE READER:

Being as it is, that this issue serves as a contribution to the search for a future where every individual has the freedom to author their own life.

All the pieces within this issue have been assembled as an attempt to contribute to this search.

Whether or not this attempt is successful lies entirely with you, the reader.

What we seek, however, is whatever sense of conflict or argument may arise during your perusal. That, indeed, is the essence of this issue

Money



My money is hard work.

My money is my mentality.

My money is luck.

But my money is with the government!

That's your deal: the government, the government,
the government.

Buy a suit, let me get you a job—
Money is all hard work!

But my money is with the government!

No, no, buy a book,
Learn about how money is all mentality

But my money is with the government!

No, no, buy a ticket—
Money is all luck!

But my money is with the government!

See, that's your deal: the government, the
government, the government.

But my money is with the government!

Well....

My money is hard work.
My money is my mentality.
My money is luck

The Human and the Other

Racism, at its core, traces its roots to beliefs such as race essentialism. Race essentialism—the idea that races possess inherent, fixed traits—is often used as a tool of modern-day racism.

Empirical research indicates that these beliefs are associated with stronger racial bias. A recent study demonstrates that racial essentialism is linked to stronger racial bias and rigid categorization of people (Ho, Roberts, & Gelman, 2015).

Further studies likewise show that individuals with high racial essentialism are more likely to stereotype others and view race as fixed and determinative of behavior.

It is, however, perplexing that this logic is unevenly distributed across social hierarchies. In certain cases, identity markers assume a defining role. This is evident when a marginalized individual commits a crime.

For example, when a member of a marginalized group commits an offense, the essentialist approach used to interpret their actions is tied directly to their group identity.

In such cases, identity overextends its role, functioning as a lens through which not only the individual's behavior is interpreted, but also that of the entire marginalized group. The central concern, however, is that this same logic is not applied to members of dominant groups.

For instance, when a dominant-group individual commits a crime, an essentialist approach is seldom used to interpret their actions. Instead, a more individualized explanation is adopted.

If a dominant-group individual steals, it is because they are an unprincipled actor. When a marginalized individual steals, however, the act is often interpreted as being inherently tied to their group.

The issue with this approach is that, in the dominant-group individual's case, a humanistic

and individualized interpretation is applied—one that acknowledges that anyone can be flawed. Their identity is not used as a lens through which all other members of their group are judged.

In this sense, they are human first before their group identity, and that identity is treated as irrelevant to their character.

In contrast, the marginalized individual is categorized by group identity before they are human, and that identity is taken as the defining explanation for who they are.

This raises the question of what causes such disparity. I argue that it can be understood through what I define as the concept of:

Human Fluidity Privilege

Human Fluidity Privilege describes a structural asymmetry in social perception whereby members of dominant groups are granted the

latitude to embody multiple, even contradictory, identities—such as being moral or flawed, exceptional or ordinary—without these traits being generalized to their group.

In contrast, marginalized individuals are frequently denied this fluidity, as their actions and identities are interpreted through rigid, pre-existing stereotypes, effectively fixing them into static social categories and restricting the full recognition of their humanity.

I argue that this concept explains the disparity in social perception even within essentialist belief systems. Given that such disparity exists, it becomes evident that there are identifiable beneficiaries—namely, those whose identities are not reduced to singular interpretations.

This suggests that race essentialism produces structural bias that disproportionately targets marginalized groups, reinforcing its role as a tool of modern-day dominance.

When one group is afforded the ability to embody multiple identities and fully exercise their humanity while another is denied that same opportunity, it becomes evident why hierarchy persists.

This leads to one fundamental question: Who is human, and who is the other?

“The Human and the Other”

Having established the above, it can be argued that these beliefs create exclusionary structures in the recognition and exercise of humanity. This manifests in such a way that the privilege of human fluidity is afforded to only a few, while others are confined to fixed identities.

Consequently, these structures produce a stark disparity in social perception and, more importantly, result in dehumanization.

If only one group is afforded the privileges of humanity—such as individuality and the

freedom to embody multiple identities—where, then, does that leave everyone else?

Human Fluidity Privilege operates in such a way that dominant groups are perceived as the default humans and are therefore granted neutrality, while marginalized counterparts are viewed primarily through the lens of static categorization.

This creates a system of fluidity versus fixity, where members of dominant groups are seen as deserving of the latitude to embody various identities, whereas marginalized individuals are positioned within fixed, pre-existing stereotypes that are continually reinforced through essentialist frameworks.

Given that studies demonstrate that essentialist beliefs are associated with bias and rigid categorization of people (Ho, Roberts, & Gelman, 2015), alongside inconsistencies in how traits are attributed within such belief

systems, this effectively produces a process of othering in society.

This othering manifests in the monopolization of human fluidity by dominant groups and is sustained through the dehumanization of those positioned outside this privilege. Thus, society becomes divided into two categories: the human and “the other.”

This disparity extends beyond isolated cases and manifests in broader social contexts. For instance, documented accounts show that marginalized legal professionals are sometimes mistaken for defendants in courtrooms (Wilson, 2020).

This reflects the earlier claim that marginalized individuals are often viewed through the lens of group identity, with individual actions generalized across the whole group—an approach that stands in sharp contrast to how their dominant counterparts are perceived.

These consequences extend beyond perception and into tangible injustices. Studies have shown that bias can influence how evidence is interpreted in courtrooms (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000), demonstrating that such biases do not merely shape opinion but actively affect legal outcomes.

In this way, the administration of justice itself can become distorted.

Perhaps more concerning, however, is the extent to which these belief systems serve to justify exclusionary practices. Research indicates that individuals who hold essentialist beliefs are more likely to accept social hierarchies as natural and to endorse stereotypes (Bastian & Haslam, 2006).

It is therefore unsurprising that such patterns contribute to the persistence of deep social divisions sustained by othering and exclusion.

If structural hierarchy ultimately depends upon denying some people the full latitude of

humanity while reserving that humanity for others, then its deepest operation is not merely prejudice but the unequal recognition of personhood.

To this end, one question persists: who is human and who is made to be the other?

Flounder



It, to me, is a feeling of fear.

I fear for myself.

I have no understanding of it.

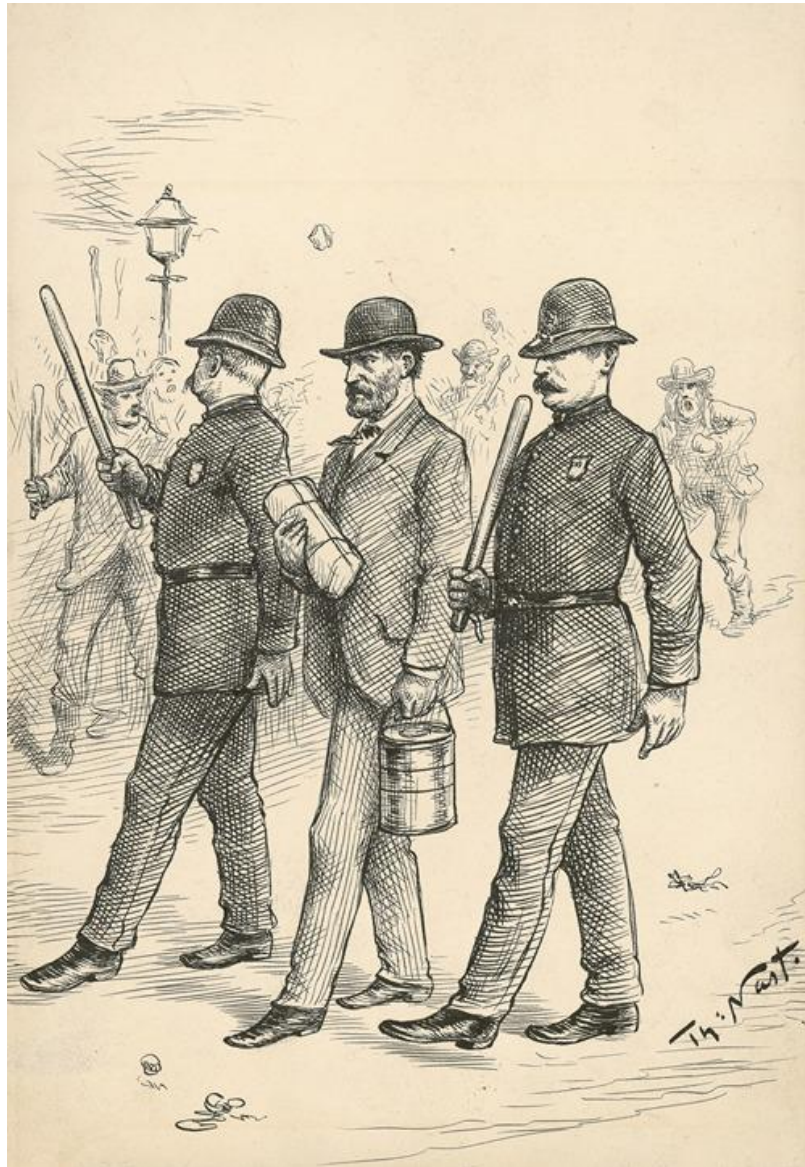
How complex it is,
that because of my complexion,
I dance to the tune of a punishment
only as deep as my tone.

What should I make of this?

It, to me, is a feeling of fear.

I fear for myself.

Oppressive Dominance Dynamics



The need for superiority, even when unearned, is one of the most enduring human impulses. It is therefore unsurprising that racial hierarchy continues to structure social life.

That superiority can be claimed by reason of race — a mundane human variation — helps explain why conquest persists. If superiority required sustained labor or distinction, rather than convenience, racism might have been short-lived. Instead, guaranteed superiority — particularly on the basis of skin — continues to beguile even modern societies. Racism has therefore learned to adapt, reproducing itself even under conditions of apparent progress or equality.

The adaptive logic through which racism persists is what I call Oppressive Dominance Dynamics (ODD).

Oppressive Dominance Dynamics (ODD) is a theoretical framework for understanding how systems of prejudice, hierarchy, and social domination persist, adapt, and reproduce themselves under conditions of apparent progress or equality. ODD operates through three interrelated mechanisms:

Compensatory–Derivative Superiority (CDS),

which explains the psychological orientation toward hierarchy; Rotational Hierarchy Syndrome (RHS), which describes how dominance is socially enacted; and Privilege Preservation Panic (PPP), which emerges when hierarchy feels threatened. Together, these dynamics illuminate why oppression does not simply disappear with progress, but reorganizes itself.

Compensatory–Derivative Superiority (CDS)

Compensatory–Derivative Superiority (CDS) describes a hierarchical orientation in which individuals derive entitlement, worth, or superiority from unearned identity traits — such as race, nationality, beauty, gender, or social belonging — rather than, or in addition to, earned

achievement or substantive contribution. At its core, CDS is not defined by the absence of

achievement, but by dependence on unearned identity as a legitimizing force within hierarchy. Ordinary human traits are transformed into evaluative assets, positioning certain identities as naturally elevated.

CDS appears in two primary forms.

Compensatory CDS emerges when individuals lacking meaningful achievement rely on unearned traits as a substitute for accomplishment. In this form, identity becomes a shield against perceived inadequacy. A man with no social or economic power may still find assurance in racial or national superiority; a woman excluded from prestige may cling to beauty or proximity to a dominant identity through race. This is the most visible and brittle expression of CDS — loud, defensive, and easily threatened — because the superiority it rests on has no internal anchor.

Consider, for instance, the resentment often expressed by individuals who have not

materially advanced yet speak with certainty about who deserves less. Their confidence does not arise from contribution, but from comparison. If they cannot rise, they must still remain above someone.

Derivative CDS, by contrast, appears when individuals possess achievement or status, yet continue to rely on unearned identity to naturalize, elevate, or legitimate that success. Here, identity does not replace achievement; it frames it. Success is presumed to be deserved before it is examined, while failure is excused as anomaly rather than evidence. A dominant-group professional's advancement is read as merit; a marginalized person's is read as exception.

Derivative CDS is quieter, institutional, and frequently mistaken for neutrality or meritocracy.

A university, for example, may insist it selects "the best," while consistently reproducing the

same demographic profile. Achievement is not fabricated — but the conditions that render it legible are uneven. Identity quietly does the work that evaluation claims not to do.

In both forms, CDS sustains the same structure: dignity is not equal, but distributed.

Rotational Hierarchy Syndrome (RHS)

Rotational Hierarchy Syndrome (RHS) describes the social process through which hostility and exclusion are rotated among marginalized groups in order to preserve hierarchy rather than dismantle it. When overt discrimination against one group becomes socially unacceptable, dominance does not retreat; it redirects.

RHS explains why progress often feels real while hierarchy remains intact. Targets shift, language softens, and new villains emerge — yet the underlying structure holds. The bottom

rotates; the peak does not. Dominant identity remains the unspoken evaluative standard.

An illustrative example can be seen in moments when racial hostility gives way to xenophobia, or when sexism momentarily recedes only for gender non-conforming to become newly scrutinized. Each shift is framed as moral concern, common sense, or social stability. What changes is not the logic of exclusion, but its object.

RHS also recruits marginalized people into enforcing hierarchy by offering comparative relief: you may not be at the top, but at least you are not them. Participation in prejudice can therefore feel temporarily empowering, even as it reinforces dominance.

Privilege Preservation Panic (PPP)

Privilege Preservation Panic (PPP) is a fear-driven response that emerges when

historically advantaged groups perceive their unearned advantages to be eroding. Unlike CDS and

RHS, PPP is reactive rather than constant. It surfaces when dominance is no longer secure.

PPP is often expressed through moral panic, nostalgia for tradition, demographic anxiety, and re-exclusion of previously ordinary traits such as citizenship or cultural belonging. Because privilege is frequently mistaken for normalcy, its loss is experienced as injustice rather than correction.

One sees PPP in moments of social expansion — when access broadens, representation shifts, or historical narratives are questioned. What follows is not always open hostility, but a sudden insistence on rules, standards, and boundaries that had previously gone unspoken. PPP emerges when compensatory and rotational strategies no longer feel sufficient.

Together, CDS, RHS, and PPP reveal that oppression survives not through stagnation, but through flexibility. Hierarchy adapts. It learns when to shout, when to disguise itself, and when to panic.

Indeed, the need for superiority, even when unearned, remains one of humanity's most destructive impulses.

The Albescens Berry



The white man says I'm special.

He loves my albescent blackness.

He calls me an albescent berry—
almost orange.

The white man says I'm eloquent.

He says I speak like him,
that I'm not like the others.

The white man says I'm hardworking
He says I'm not like the others—
that I try.

The white man says I'm classy.
I dress like him.
I cannot tell—
if I am classy because I dress like him,
or if I dress like him because I am.

The white man says I'm intelligent.
I cut my hair—
so now books can enter.

The white man says I'm better.

I agree.

I have outrun him—

but he tells me I'm only better than my people.

What people?

The white man thinks himself the umpire—
and me a competitor.

Held for Today (Daily Portion)

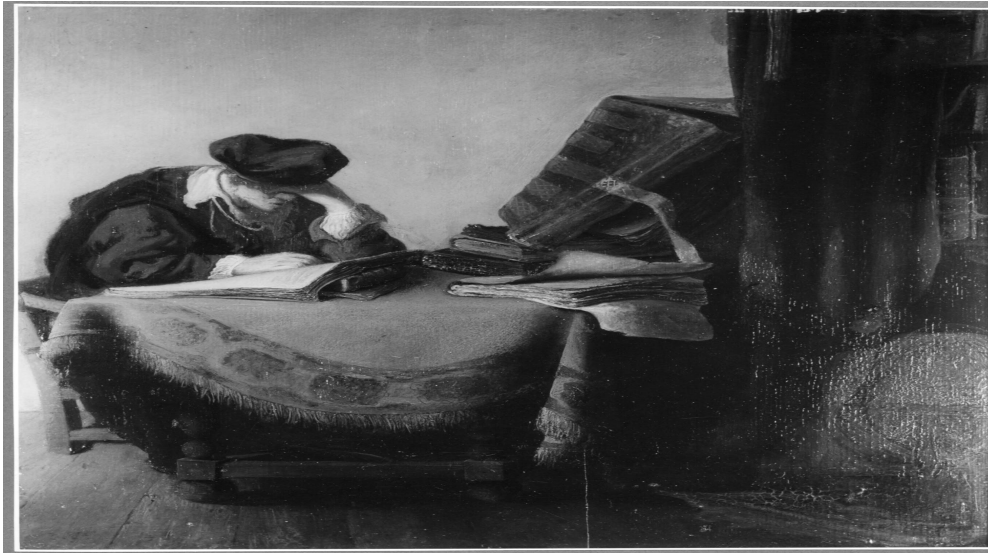


Sometimes stigma does not arrive loudly. It arrives quietly-through neglect, limitation, and the subtle ways society expects less from certain individuals before they even have the chance to become more.

In this work, the cup is not merely a vessel for survival; it serves as a symbol of how little light certain lives are permitted to hold. This constraint does not stem from a lack of dreams, intelligence, or strength, but from circumstances and societal judgments that systematically narrow what is possible.

Many live with potential that never fully breathes —not due to inability, but under the weight of labels imposed too early regarding poverty, background, or origin. Held for Today reflects that quiet human condition: receiving life in portions while continuing to protect hope with both hands.

Author



And now,
It seems to me that my control eludes me,
Where I should faith I have but my fate.

It is now so
That when I pray
And pray only for myself,
My mind reminds me of my folly.

What sort of persecution is this?

A persecution so complex because of my
complexion.

I had received no admonition,
And I am filled with despair.

And so, as I behold these troubles,
It seems to me that my control eludes me.

A Letter to God



A Letter to God is part of *The Lord's Prayer Project*, a body of work exploring yearning, longing, desire, and the ways these emotions

shape faith during moments of suffering and loss.

The work considers the intimate relationship between human desire and spiritual endurance. In moments of uncertainty, loss, and longing, faith can become a space where we express what we cannot hold or understand. A letter becomes both a confession and a form of prayer, reaching toward something beyond the physical.

Through the work, Ismail reflects on how longing can reshape our understanding of faith, transforming prayer into a language of desire, hope, questioning, and endurance.

Dispossession



Today I was caught unawares
by an insight which briefly livened my lifeless day
like lightning does to a clear summer sky.

I was dining with my grandparents:
while they were handing me a plate of pasta
and a glass of wine
I, a visiting emigrant,
could feel both reproach and empathy
in their unspoken words
and their piercing glances

They had loved their area,
and they probably still do,
with the same urgent, longing affection
of Renzo and Lucia in
The Betrothed.

They, who had left their native land
long decades ago out of necessity,
driven by hunger and job scarcity.

I left my native country
six years ago,
with head erect and eyes full of expectations,
purely out of choice.
I did it out of love,
not for a person,
but for a country, a culture, a life
rich in faults and wonders,
for that is what love brings.

You will find me engulfed in a limbo of
uncertainty,
leaning towards three languages
and cultures,
ready to offer divided attention
to each of them.

Running in circles,
I feel like a child playing

ring-a-ring-o-rosie
near a market stall.

At times,
I reckon I am following in the footsteps
of Joyce and Columbanus, in the opposite
direction.

As I was dining
with my grandparents
I fathomed that I was
a changeling,
swapped at birth,
though my physical appearance said otherwise.

My grandparents were talking
to a neighbour, a distant relative,
about cucumbers
and other farmers' matters.
The awareness struck me

that all four grandparents of mine
were small farmers:
they spent their days sweating in the sun,
working with a spade, loving their crops.

And here I am,
a bookish girl,
half-scholar, half-poet,
who cannot recognise
one plant from another
in real life.

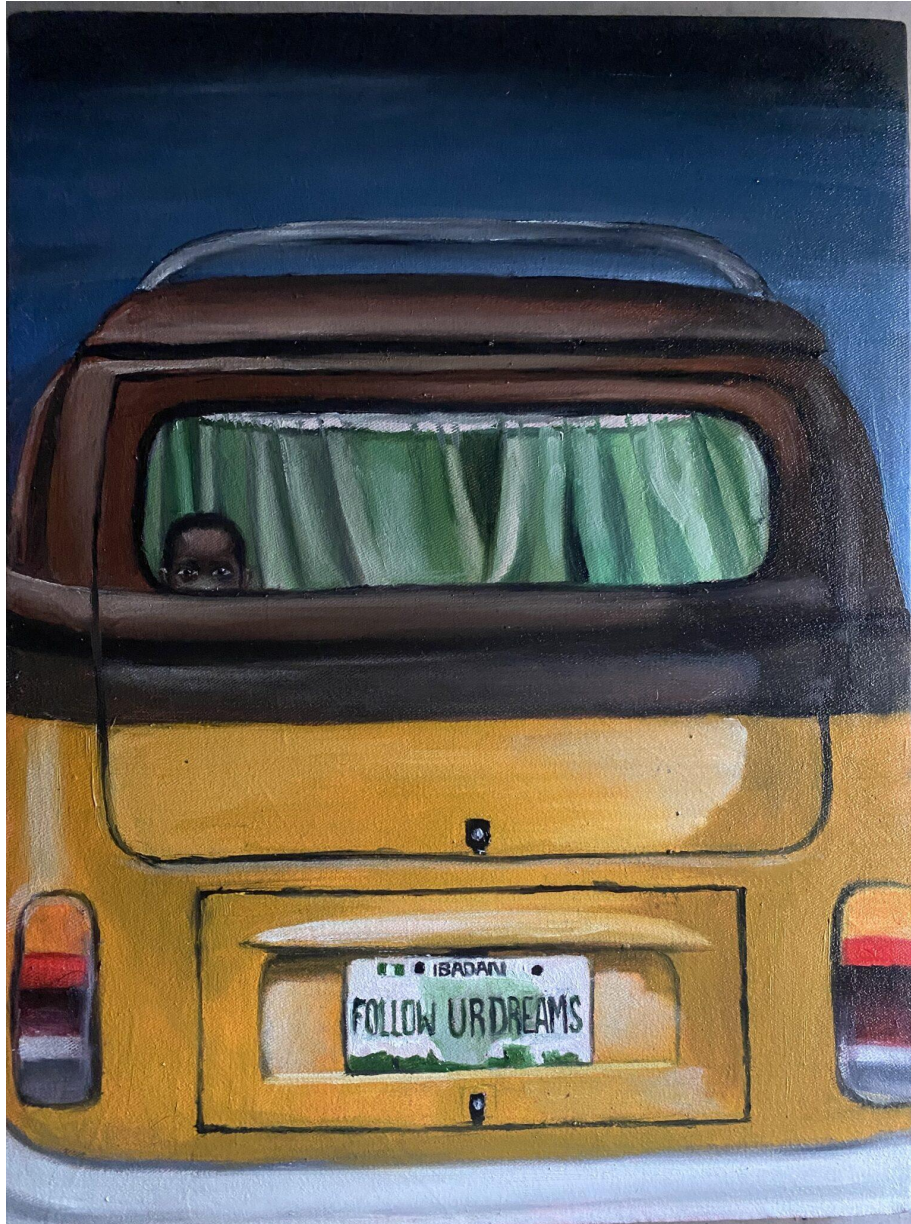
Are they really my relatives?

Are they really my blood?

Of course, I would have not fulfilled
the three-generation requirement
prescribed by Early Irish law.

But, after all,
the cultivation of the mind
recalls that of plants.

Follow Your Dreams



Follow Your Dreams is inspired by the slogan,
“A moving man will surely meet his luck.”

The work is a personal reflection on how we are constantly encouraged from childhood to dream

big, even in a country where those dreams can be swallowed by insecurity and difficult living conditions.

Despite these circumstances, society, family, and friends continue to encourage us to dream bigger, and we hold on to the hope that one day those aspirations will come to fruition.

In the painting, a young child — the muse — is depicted peeping out from the back of a bus toward the unknown. The image reflects the uncertainty of the future while also suggesting the expectation that, even in uncertainty, hope should be allowed to blossom.

The phrase “**FOLLOW UR DREAMS**”, written on the vehicle’s license plate, is a central detail of the work. It serves as a reminder that pursuing our dreams may eventually lead us somewhere meaningful.

The Ritual of Becoming



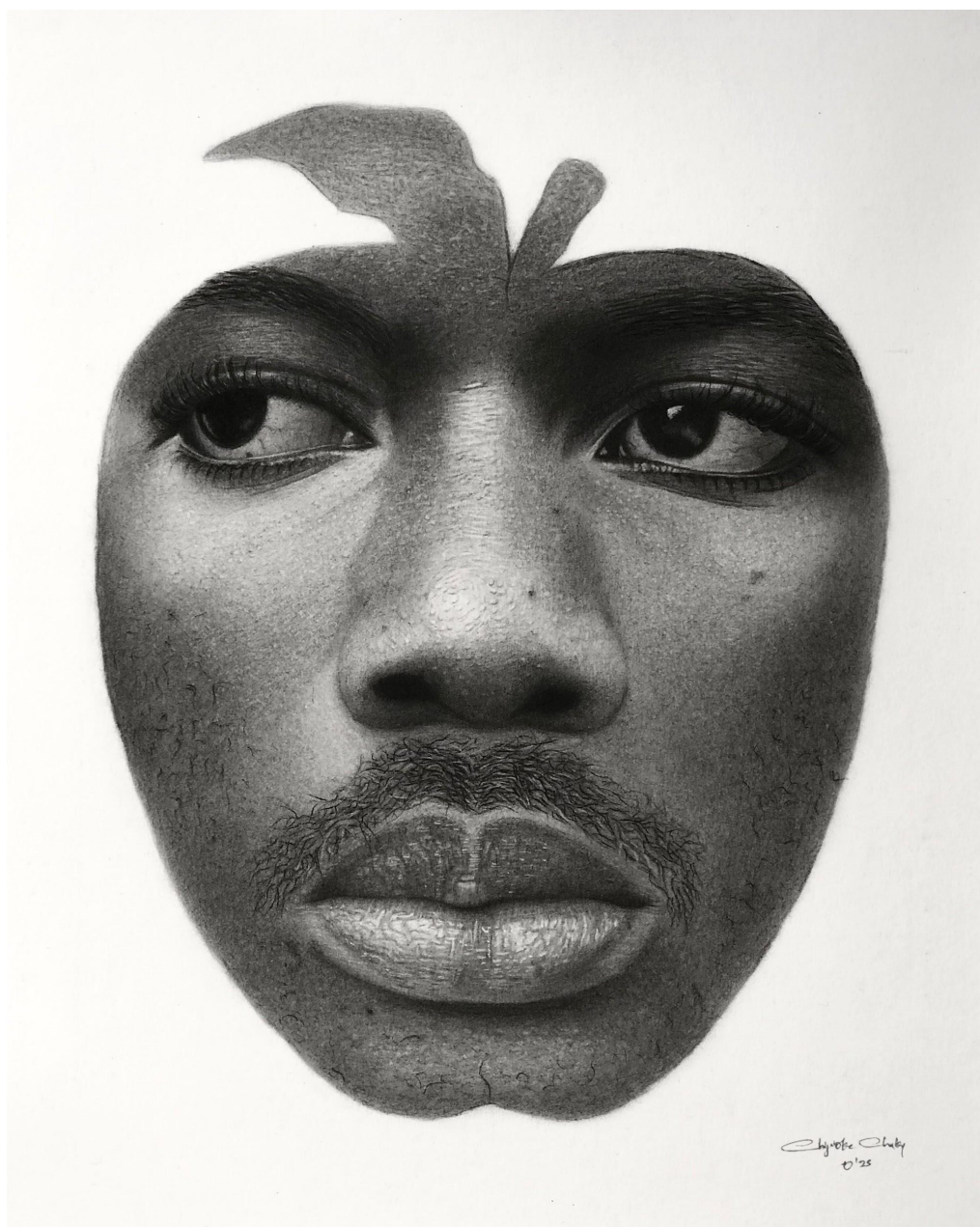
A striking portrait capturing the quiet, transformative power of self-discovery and heritage. Layered with stitched geometric tiles,

the artwork weaves together intimate daily routines—grooming, writing, and intellectual grounding through celebrated literature by Adichie and Achebe—framing self-actualization as a deliberate, crafted tapestry.

In this painting, self-definition is presented not as a passive inheritance, but as an active, deliberate process rooted in interiority, study, and quiet contemplation.

The layered, stitched canvas panels physically mirror the conditions that shape human lives, representing societal frameworks, structural realities, and historical fragments. Rather than allowing these fragments to dictate her reality, the subject sits at the center of the modular surface, actively piecing together her narrative—capturing how selfhood is constructed piece by piece.

Seed of Self



Seed of Self is a surreal self-portrait nestled within the contours of an apple, exploring the

intricate layers of identity and the core of one's being. It captures the self as a perpetual work in progress—a seed that, much like the fruit that houses it, is shaped by its seasons, quietly growing and changing over time.

CONCEPTS & FRAMEWORKS:

- Human Fluidity Privilege

A structural asymmetry in social perception whereby members of dominant groups are granted the latitude to embody multiple, even contradictory, identities—such as being moral or flawed, exceptional or ordinary—without these traits being generalized to their entire group. In contrast, marginalized individuals are denied this fluidity, as their actions are interpreted through rigid, pre-existing stereotypes that fix them into static social categories

- Oppressive Dominance Dynamics (ODD)

A theoretical framework for understanding how systems of prejudice, hierarchy, and social domination persist, adapt, and reproduce themselves under conditions of apparent progress or equality. ODD illuminates why oppression does not simply disappear with societal advancement, but reorganizes itself through adaptive mechanisms.

- Compensatory–Derivative Superiority (CDS)

A hierarchical orientation in which individuals derive entitlement, worth, or superiority from unearned identity traits—such as race, nationality, beauty, or gender—rather than earned achievement. It manifests in two forms: Compensatory CDS, where unearned identity acts as a shield against personal inadequacy; and Derivative CDS, where institutional power quietly frames unearned privilege as natural merit.

- Rotational Hierarchy Syndrome (RHS)

The social process through which hostility and exclusion are rotated among different marginalized groups to preserve the underlying hierarchy rather than dismantle it. When discrimination against one group becomes socially unacceptable, dominant structures shift focus to a new target, ensuring the peak of the hierarchy remains intact while the bottom rotates.

- Privilege Preservation Panic (PPP)

A reactive, fear-driven response that emerges when historically advantaged groups perceive their unearned advantages or social dominance to be eroding. Expressed through moral panic, nostalgic appeals to tradition, and demographic anxiety, PPP treats the loss of unearned privilege as an injustice rather than a correction of equality.

Contributors:

- Chukwuemerie Chijioke Anekwe

Chukwuemerie Chijioke Anekwe (b. 1999), known by the moniker Chuky, is a Nigerian hyper-realistic and surrealistic artist based in Enugu State. Working in the monochrome rigour of charcoal and graphite, his self-taught practice employs double-exposure and fragmentation to map internal consciousness, emotional depth, and social truths. His artworks, *Clarity of Mind II* and *Seed of Self*, are featured in this issue.

- Dr. Tiziana Soverino

Dr. Tiziana Soverino is an Italian-born, Ireland-based bilingual poet, scholar, and editor whose academic work centers on folklore and social justice. Her poetry has

appeared in Landing Places, Boyne Berries, Unapologetic, and The Storms. Her poem, Dispossessions, appears in this issue.

- Belinda Shalls

Belinda Shalls (Semilore Ifeoluwa Adewole) is a Nigerian contemporary visual artist, writer, and model based in Ibadan. Working in vibrant paints and charcoal, her practice explores themes of faith, resilience, society, and dance to challenge norms and inspire hope. Her artwork, Follow Your Dreams, is featured in this issue

- Chidinma Ezenwa

Chidinma Ezenwa is a Nigerian law student, writer, and the founder and editor-in-chief of Incongru. Her writing examines identity, agency, power structures, and the sociopolitical conditions that shape human experience. She is

also the founder of Ambiwoman, an initiative focused on leadership opportunities for young women. Her essays, *The Human and The Other* and *Oppressive Dominance Dynamics*, alongside her poems, *Money*, *Author*, *The Albescent Berry*, and *Flounder*, appear in this issue.

- Bashiru Olatunji

Bashiru Olatunji is a Nigerian visual artist based in Ibadan, Oyo State, holding a Higher National Diploma in Fine Art from The Polytechnic, Ibadan. Working primarily in oil and acrylic, his figurative practice explores memory, emotional survival, identity, and social realities within underserved communities. His work, *Held For Today*, appears in this issue.

- Amidu Samson Tobiloba

Amidu Samson Tobiloba is a Nigerian visual artist based in Lagos and a Higher National Diploma graduate in Painting from Yaba College of Technology. His impressionistic practice highlights the richness and complexity of Black experiences, focusing on dark-skinned subjects navigating landscapes of leisure and quiet reflection. His work, *The Ritual of Becoming*, appears in this issue.

- Ganiu Ismail

Ganiu Ismail is a Lagos-based multidisciplinary artist working across painting, pastel, textile, and installation. Drawing from Yoruba culture and Islamic spirituality, his practice utilizes materials like Aṣọ Òkè as living archives to reflect on memory, loss, and spiritual endurance. His work, *A Letter to God*, appears in this issue.

